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THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD IN ITS RELATION TO FREEDOM AND IMMORTALITY

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Recent writers on religious metaphysics have laid extraordinary emphasis upon the immanence of God. In so far as this stress comes as a protest against the practical deism of the churches and the popular atheism of the masses, it is eminently proper and just. While emphasizing, however, the immanence of God, there is great danger of slighting his transcendence, and of thus erecting an insidious pantheism, which cannot fail to have a baneful effect upon a healthy freedom and the hope of immortality. To show that the freedom of man and his immortality depend upon the transcendence of God, and that the transcendence itself must be based upon faith, is the object of this paper.

How thoroughgoing this emphasis upon the immanence of God has become may best be seen from some quotations. Thus R. J. Campbell in his remarkable book: *The New Theology*, says that "the starting-point of the new theology is a re-emphasis of the Christian belief in the divine immanence in the universe and in mankind."¹ "*The New Theology* holds that we know nothing and can know nothing of the Infinite Cause whence all things proceed except as we read Him in His universe, and in our own souls. It is the immanent God with whom we have to do, and if this obvious fact is once firmly grasped it will simplify all our religious conceptions and give us a working faith."² What he means by "God" is shown from the next quotation: "When I say God, I mean the mysterious Power which is finding expression in the universe, and which is present in every tiniest atom of the wondrous whole. I find that this Power is the one reality I cannot get away from, for, whatever else it may be, it is myself."³ Campbell himself realizes how pantheistic this

¹ *The New Theology*, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

sounds, but he declaims against a pantheistic interpretation of his views, and says in one place that it is an obvious truth that the infinite being of God must transcend the infinite universe. This statement is, however, greatly qualified when we read that there is no dividing line except from our side, and that "God is my deeper self and yours too; he is the self of the universe and knows all about it." Consequently, "with Tennyson you can call this doctrine the higher pantheism, but it is the very antithesis of the pantheism which has played such a part in the history of thought."⁴ It appears that Campbell objects against a deterministic pantheism, and that, while he grants the transcendence of God, he yet limits the knowledge of God to his immanence, and practically shuts us off from any but an immanent God. Our purpose is not to enter an extended criticism against Campbell, as the incongruities of his position obtrude themselves upon every intelligent reader; suffice it to say that his insistence upon immanence comes very near being as pantheistic as it can be. Where there is no dividing line between God and us, except as it appears to us, and where I myself am a part of God, it hardly seems worth while to argue against fatalism, because if God has less knowledge of the universe than we have, and if he is incorporated in ourselves, he can scarcely be omniscient and omnipotent, unless indeed all our knowing and doing were an idle dream. Either we exist as independent beings or we do not; if the former, then God is distinct from us; if the latter, the distinction vanishes and the world is one vast illusion, in which God sports with his own mental fancies. It is noteworthy, in this connection, that no one can be a practical pantheist, at least no fatalist, as even the Stoics found out.

Another writer who strongly insists upon immanence, is Sir Oliver Lodge. His book, *The Substance of Faith*, which aims to be a scientific catechism, says in part: "We are a part of the universe, and the universe is a part of God. Even we also, therefore, have a divine nature and may truly be called sons and co-workers with God."⁵ Of immanence he says: "The lavish beauty of wild Nature—of landscape, of sunset, of mountain, and of sea—are revelations of an indwelling Presence, rejoicing in its majestic order—*πάντα πλήρη*

⁴ *The New Theology*, p. 35.

⁵ *Substance of Faith*, p. 45.

θεῶν.”⁶ “It is sometimes said that the operations of Nature are spontaneous and that is exactly what they are. That is the meaning of immanence: ‘spontaneous,’ used in this sense, does not mean random and purposeless and undetermined: it means actuated and controlled from within, by something indwelling and all-pervading and not absent anywhere.”⁷ That the physical scientist should thus closely agree with the theologian is certainly remarkable, and it suggests how alluring the terms of pantheism are when describing immanence. There is, of course, an obvious truth in God’s presence in Nature, the divine immanence in the universe, but it is hardly adequately stated when the universe is described as part of God. However many traces of *divinity* we find in man and Nature, we find no evidences of *deity* in them; and this is the point. Immanence means that the universe is divine, and no more. It can call up moods of exaltation and of fellowship, but not of adoration and worship. The transcendence of God, which means that he is not to be confounded with the universe, nor yet shares his incommunicable being with man, however much both world and man are related to him, alone can give the feeling of worship which the creature feels for its creator.

It was Aristotle who first conceived in a scientific way of God as transcendent. His Pure Form is at once the Prime Mover, the Ground and End of change, much as Plato’s Idea of the Good, and at the same time perfect Being, resting itself, in which all possibility is actualized. In this conception Aristotle solved the problem of Greek philosophy: how to reconcile Being with Becoming, by positing the form as the essence realizing itself in phenomena; but he also created another problem: the transcendence of God. By making the Deity the highest Form, his system of individual forms found indeed their impulse to realization through matter as potentiality, yet because he planted this Form apart by itself, unmoved, eternal, unchangeable, he raised a question of momentous import for all succeeding philosophy. However, as Windelband says: “Spiritual monotheism is the ripe fruit of Grecian science.” While with Aristotle God as Pure Form was transcendent, and yet as animating, first-moving power immanent, to the Stoics this distinction became obliterated in a pantheistic view of the world.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

The fundamental view of the Stoics is that the entire universe forms a single unitary, living, connected whole, and that all particular things are the determinate forms assumed by a divine primitive power which is in a state of eternal activity. Their doctrine is in its fundamental principles *pantheism*, and (in opposition to Aristotle) conscious pantheism. The immediate consequence of it, however, is the energetic effort to overcome the Platonic-Aristotelian dualism, and remove the opposition between sensuous and supersensuous, between natural necessity and reason acting according to ends, between Matter and Form.⁸

The simple identification of immanence and transcendence, however, does not, says Windelband, put their opposing characters out of the world. Accordingly, the neo-Platonic doctrine emphasizes the Stoic antipode—transcendence. Here the desire to separate God from the world led to conceive of him as devoid of qualities. Even spirit became a product of deity, which is itself completely ineffable, absolutely transcendent above the world. "This One, τὸ ἓν, precedes all thought and Being; it is infinite, formless, and 'beyond' the intellectual as well as the sensuous world, and therefore without consciousness and without activity."⁹ While Plotinus lost himself in abstract thought without any content, the Christian church held fast to the idea of God as spiritual personality.

Hellenism sees in personality, in however purely spiritual a manner it may be conceived, a restriction and a characteristic of the finite, which it would keep at a distance from the Supreme Being, and admit only for the particular gods. Christianity, as a living religion, demands a *personal relation of man to the ground of the world, conceived of as supreme personality*, and it expresses this demand in the thought of the *divine sonship* of man.¹⁰

The Middle Ages added little to the knowledge of these twin problems: immanence and transcendence. In the philosophy of Averroës their distinction became purely verbal, and God as Pure Form and moving Force is regarded as *Natura Naturans*, while as matter and moved world he is *Natura Naturata*. The same conceptions meet us from another motive. Realism, following neo-Platonism, saw the highest reality in the most universal concepts, and consequently the idea of God became joined with that of the greatest universality, hence *ens realissimum*. By its universality it embraced

⁸ W. Windelband, *History of Philosophy*, p. 180.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

all particular things, and through its descending line of genera and species all things became its manifestations or phenomenal appearances. Real dependence was deduced from logical dependence, and as only the universal was held to be real, God as the highest Reality assumed all reality. Pantheism is the logical consequence of Realism.

In modern times, especially, the Hegelian philosophy has set itself the task of understanding the relation between God and the world. God as Subjective Spirit externalizes himself into Nature, or Objective Spirit, after which, having become self-conscious through humanity, he returns unto himself as Absolute Spirit. This process proceeds with all the rigor of dialectic logic, and presents the idea of development in its largest sense as a self-realization of the Deity. The System of Reason, however, was not destined to become the sole theogony. Schelling soon taught the metaphysics of the Irrational; the Ideas as counterpart of the Absolute find in their self-subsistence cause for falling away from God, with Nature as the result. Their apostasy is unnecessary, but their return to God is history. Still later Schelling believed in the unreason of the Divine Will being the cause of created things. This thought was more fully developed by Schopenhauer's pessimism, in which the Divine Will, ever struggling to realize itself, is never satisfied with its objectifications, and hence creates a world of misery, from which no escape but through self-renunciation is possible. Hegel's optimism ends in Schopenhauer's pessimism, but both have the term "pantheism" writ large in their characters.

While metaphysics thus often confused the transcendence and the immanence of God, theology maintained their distinction with more success, though frequently with infraction of logic and at the cost of their true relation. The deism of the eighteenth century exalted God's transcendence so as to leave little room for his immanence, although, at times, their positions were quite reversed. Ordinary dogmatic theology still speaks of God's transcendence and immanence as though nothing could be simpler, whereas, in fact, nothing is more difficult to comprehend. Creation out of nothing, and at a stated time, while verbally possible, is unthinkable and obscures the real issue. How then are we to think of these two terms, which elude us while we are speaking about them?

For all practical purposes the question may resolve itself in this way: Granted an infinite creation, how can the distinction between God and World be maintained? How can space be infinite, i. e., endless, and God omnipresent, without conceiving this in a materialistic way? How can time be durationless, and God nevertheless above time? Even so, how can becoming be endless, yea, infinite, creation infinite and God, notwithstanding, Infinity itself? To say that becoming begins with time simply removes the problem, and is, moreover, based upon a wrong conception of both. For, in God we recognize the most perfect unchangeableness with the greatest activity, most perfect being with most restless becoming. Becoming and being, activity and rest, find in God their harmony. How this is possible, we do not know: we believe it to be so. But while we believe it, we are not able to disguise the fact that the idea of God has been composed of the most contradictory elements. In so far God is the *coincidentia oppositorum*. And now, while there may be a difference between eternity and an endless time, by us men such a difference cannot well be thought. A time that begins, and afterward ceases to be, as the Bible teaches, is only a part of time, because before the beginning and after the end there must be also something happening. Time is formally endless, and materially it cannot be conceived of otherwise. Becoming is just so much eternal as Being.

We can only then maintain the distinction between God and creation when we conceive of this theistically. In this wise we can call creation divine, without identifying it with God. An infinite creation from the infinite God, this alone satisfies us. For science, although concerned with definite times, definite spaces, and definite quantities of power, brings us so immediately into the presence of an eternity of time, a limitless space, and an infinity of energy, that we cannot but believe in an infinite creation, timeless and spaceless.

Science shows us that there can be no conceivable limits to space or time, and though finiteness of matter or of operation may be conceivable, there is manifest incongruity in assuming an infinite disproportion between unoccupied and occupied space, or between void time and time occupied with the occurrence of events of what sort soever. So that the teachings of science bring us into the presence of the unquestionable infinities of time and of space, and the presumable infinities of matter and of operation—hence, therefore, into the presence of infinity of energy. But science teaches us nothing about these infinities, as

such. They remain none the less inconceivable, however clearly we may be taught to recognize their reality.¹¹

If this is true of the material infinities, how much more of the spiritual infinity! If we cannot form a conception of eternity, of endless space, and of infinite energy, how much the less of an almighty God, immanent in and yet transcendent above creation, infinite, eternal, omniscient, all-beneficent, perfect in every attribute!

Inconceivable, doubtless, are these infinities of time and space, of matter, of motion, and of life. Inconceivable that the whole universe can for all time be the scene of the operation of infinite personal power, omnipresent, all-knowing. Utterly incomprehensible how Infinite Purpose can be associated with endless material evolution. But it is no new thought, no modern discovery, that we are thus utterly powerless to conceive or comprehend the idea of an Infinite Being, Almighty, All-knowing, Omnipresent, and Eternal, of whose inscrutable purpose the material universe is the unexplained manifestation. Science is in presence of the old, old mystery; the old, old questions are asked of her: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" And science answers these questions, as they were answered of old: "As touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out."¹²

A mighty truth, this of the powerlessness of science to explain God or even the world! But how, indeed, should the finite comprehend the infinite? Here *faith* alone is able to clear the way. Science can only speak of an "infinite and inscrutable Energy, whence all things proceed"; faith can tell of an almighty God and Father, who bears up the universe by the word of his power, whose providence covers all things, so that not a sparrow falls upon the earth without his will. And now, whether the universe be infinite or not, have a beginning or not, faith continues to speak of God the Father, hoping against hope. If the universe be infinite, then the relation between God and creation must be conceived of as a *logical* one, not as a temporal or spatial relation. God is in the world, and yet not of the world; the world is not God, and God is not the world, although he cannot be thought without the world. While we, however, can conclude in a way to the immanence of God, as a judgment of experience (cf. Kant's *Transcendental Dialectics*), we are totally unable to prove the trans-

¹¹ Richard A. Proctor, *Essays in Astronomy*, pp. 57, 58.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

cendence of God. Science and philosophy have done their utmost when they bring us into the presence of the Unconditioned and the Absolute; they do not define these terms further. Hence faith must guarantee the transcendence of God.

If we are to think of God's relation to his universe in logical terms, however, what is to become of the sharp distinction between his immanence and his transcendence? Are these terms simply useless and meaningless? By no means, but they serve still an important function. They prevent the identification of the universe with God, a danger present in all immanence teaching. A logical relation between God and the world is also a *real* relation, and not purely verbal. There is a difference between aboriginal being and derived being, between incommunicable essence persisting through all the forms of phenomenal life and that phenomenal life itself, between archetype and image, between God and the children of God. True, we do not exist apart from God, no more than we live outside of the air surrounding us, but still, we are not a part of God, at least not metaphysically. Ethically we may be one with God, and our wills be at union with his will; metaphysically we are derived beings, depending on a higher power for maintenance. That this higher power is not devoid of personal intelligence and will, even pure immanence can show; as Oliver Lodge says, the term "God" must include everything existent in the universe, hence also those powers and attributes found in ourselves.

We conceive of theism then in this way, that God be not separated deistically from, nor pantheistically identified with, the world, but be both immanent in and transcendent above the world. We recognize that the transcendence of God, though verbally possible and metaphysically necessary, cannot become a proper object of thought, bound as it is by immediate and derived experience to time and space and the categories within a universe of which it is itself a part, and above which it cannot rise. In short, what the relation be between God and creature, how God is indwelling and yet above the universe, no mere creature can say. When God speaks throughout the universe and when the mystery of being surrounds us on all sides, when an infinite creation presses upon us, we can only say: We are of yesterday and know nothing. Direct knowledge of God there is none. Through

creation we arise to the creator. If creation appears to us as infinite, shall we on that account deny the existence of the creator? Perish the thought! Why can there not be an infinite creation from the infinite God? Is it not more reasonable to believe in an infinite creation eternally present with God, created eternally by him, than to believe in a finite creation in time and space? God works eternally, shall his work not be eternal? God works as the Infinite One; shall his work not be infinite? The immutability of God demands a continuous creation; the being of God demands an infinite manifestation or revelation. His creation flows out from his essence and yet it is not that essence itself, only the revelation of his being. Thus is creation divine, but not God himself. And thus can theism be held, and be held alone. Pantheism does not satisfy. It is self-refuting: whatever proves it, also refutes it. We are related to God, of his nature, but yet are no part of him. Deism does not satisfy. The world is no part of the Creator, but yet nevertheless his divine creation. God is in everything and yet everything is not God. Creation is eternal because God is eternal; it is infinite because God is infinite; and it is divine because God creates it.

If we thus accept the transcendence of God as a part of our creed, how are the freedom and the immortality of man related to it? Can freedom as a metaphysical reality and as a psychological demand be inseparably joined together with it, flow from it? Does immortality considered as an *intensive* conscious reality and as an *extensive* metaphysical demand, stand in direct relation to it? We can at most give these subjects but a cursory attention, and consider them in their vital relation to the transcendence of God.

Metaphysically we are unable to prove the freedom of man. The laws of Nature are universal, and the psycho-physical organism is no exception to this. There is a continuity between the excitation of the sensory nerves and their reaction, and as well between sensation and reflex. Impulse and habit rule all conscious life, and a new situation but uses their material anew for another adjustment. Mechanically we are just as much a part of the causal processes of Nature as anything else is. A deterministic pantheism would make short work of freedom in a causally determined world. From the point of view of transcendent theism, however, the problem becomes some-

what more intelligible, though not fully so. If God is immanent in creation and yet transcends it, if he is above the laws of nature, then man also, although part and parcel of Nature, can yet be above her, and be able *to use* her laws, instead of being absolutely subject to them. The subjection of man to the laws of God in creation is no stupid mechanical subjection of an automaton, who is simply being lived, but is an intelligent interaction with, yes, control of, the laws of Nature by a life that lives above Nature as autonomon, which by means of subjection subjects Nature herself. To subject by subjection: in this paradox lies the freedom of man from Nature.

While thus the freedom of man in a natural way might be defended it is more difficult to establish it in an ethical manner. From a purely psychological point of view every end becomes a good, and even the most debased motive is a psychological end, once it becomes adopted. *Quidquid petitur petitur sub specie boni*. The end of an action becomes the justification of an action, consequently its "good." Recent psychology has made much of this purposive character of mental life, and pointed out how teleological and functional our consciousness is. But the instrumental character of physical life does not quite prove the ethical side of it, because this is on a higher plane. Logically there is a difference between true and false, and ethically there is a difference between good and evil, apart from all psychological processes. The psychological process is in itself neither good nor true, and the ends as factors in the continuity of conscious life are neither so; the norms of the good, the true, and the beautiful transcend the psychological processes, and place before the empirical reality the laws of the ideal world. Man transcends in and through the ideal norms of consciousness his own limited experience: no more than he is bound subject to the laws of nature, is he bound to his own given experience. The content of his consciousness may be given; he yet is no slave of that content, but masters it by subjecting it to the ideal laws of his being.

We have sought freedom in the normative laws of consciousness, transcending any given experience; we must, therefore, consider the problem of immortality in a similar manner. Time and space are the two conditions and limitations of our present life. If there is to be a future life, how will it be related to our present life? A

person can no more exist without occupying a certain time, than he can without occupying a certain definite space. He must be *somewhere, at some time*. If now the time limitation were abolished, while the spatial requirement remained, he would be *somewhere, at no time*. This is the paradoxical view held by common conceptions of immortality, which attempt to merge two absolute contradictions into one. An endless life with a risen *body*, which of course must be somewhere, and yet cannot be on account of there being no temporal limitations, no given moments—surely no sane theology can afford to harbor longer such an insane conception. So then, if time be abolished, space must also go. If both be done away with, we are in possession of an *extensive* immortality, about which we cannot, for the rest, conceive even the slightest idea. Suppose it possible, however, and we would have two attributes of infinity: eternity and omnipresence, both inconceivable to a finite mind. But where would the dividing line remain between creator and creation, if the creature received one or more attributes of infinity? Extensive immortality, whether in whole or in part, seems impossible for created beings.

Though an extensive immortality is inconceivable, an *intensive* immortality seems more possible. Intensive immortality signifies a supremely worthful life—a life in which each moment is its own justification and end. Such a life does not need to be blessed or happy—it only requires the autonomy of the spirit in order to have each moment become its own sole reason and end. Most people, however, would have small use for such an intensive immortality, unless an endless life were joined to it. But for limited beings an indefinite extension of time appears to be impossible, and the only solution would be a succession of lives under different conditions. How the personality of man could then be maintained is difficult to say. Max Müller solves this question by saying: “There is a distinction between conscious personality and personal consciousness. A child has personal consciousness; a man who is this or that, a Napoleon, a Talleyrand, has conscious personality. Much of that conscious personality is merely temporary, and passes away; but the personal consciousness remains.”¹³ Of course, one may still ask, what is the essence of that personal consciousness which persists?

¹³ *Life and Religion*, p. 40.

Our distinctions often but obscure the issue, and make us richer in verbal terms, but not in real thought. Whether we have a life beyond or not, it is pretty sure that we have no definite and authentic knowledge about our previous existence. Suppose we assume a succession of incarnations, and the question looms up: organic or not? Our present life is one with that of the race; how afterward? If similar, how can personal identity be squared with the organic life of the human race, and in what respect has it an individual existence? If not similar, how can we feel any relation to unknown conditions? Or will our knowledge be also transplanted? and how? What is then the relation between our knowledge and our brain, or between matter and spirit?

It is evident that all inquiry after immortality brings up more problems than it solves. It has become plain, meanwhile, that we are now in possession of an intensive immortality—a life of the highest possible significance, and, further, that all investigation in this direction must start from the organic life of mankind. In the human racial life lies the key to the question of, and the demand for, an immortality also extensive. We have, nevertheless, a stronger reason for believing in a continuance of personal life than the former position allowed: the principal proof is deduced from the transcendence of God, which guarantees the liberty as well as the immortality of man. As was seen we connected the freedom of man with the transcendence of God: just as God is transcendent above and immanent in creation, thus is man part and parcel of Nature, and yet her lord and master, has he his freedom *in*, although not *from*, creation. Even so it is with immortality; if God is really transcendent, then the image of God can also have a transcendent existence, and overcome the limitation of this earthly life through a successive life. From a pantheistic standpoint there would be no necessity for an immortality of man, as every personal existence would be little more than a wave of the All, a becoming conscious of the Unconscious; from a theistic point of view the question of immortality is a necessary postulate, which cannot easily be gainsaid.

The absolute transcendence of God must find its counterpart in the relative transcendence of man. Hence if consciousness is simply organic, a function of the body, and if it flows away with the death

of the body, then the image of God in man would merely have a temporal character, and not be a full, if finite, expression of the majesty of God. Creation would have lost its chief purpose, if the consciousness of man were not indestructible, and if the precious powers and talents given to the human race did not survive death. The whole desire after further life, the inextinguishable life-energy, would be inexplicable and useless, and a mere mockery. The glory of God demands the continuance of personally conscious beings and their maintenance even with changed conditions.

To recapitulate: If the world has a *real* existence, then the transcendence of God follows as a necessary deduction, unless we are to believe in a logically absurd pantheism. Further, if the consciousness of man is a *real* entity, then the freedom of man follows as a necessary consequence from the transcendence of God, the same element being involved in the freedom of man as in the transcendence of God. For the freedom of man is not merely an immanent, functional freedom, but also a transcendent, metaphysical freedom. It is a freedom which transcends any given experience; "Man reflectively *surveys* the process of the world," as Professor George B. Foster would have it. Finally, the same element in freedom which proves the autonomy of the human mind, proves also that we have through and by reason of this autonomy an *intensive* immortality, while the transcendence of God moreover assures us that, even as we are now *in possession* of immortal life, so in the future there will be no break, but a continuity of life, consequently, life eternal or an *extensive* immortality, forever and ever.